

SUNSHINE LAW MEETING  
MINUTES OF THE HAWAI'I STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

STATE OF HAWAI'I

Date: March 19, 2025

Time: 9:00 a.m.

Location: Hybrid meeting held via Zoom video and audio conference

Recorded video available at

[https://ethics.hawaii.gov/category/commissionmeetings/comm\\_videos/](https://ethics.hawaii.gov/category/commissionmeetings/comm_videos/)

Public Meeting Location

Hawai'i State Ethics Commission Conference Room  
1001 Bishop Street  
American Savings Bank Tower, Suite 970  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Present: State Ethics Commission Members

Beverley Tobias, Vice Chair (present in the conference room)  
Robert Hong, Commissioner (present in the conference room)  
Cynthia Thielen, Commissioner (present in the conference room)  
Roderick Becker, Commissioner (present in the conference room)

Excused: Wesley F. Fong, Chair

State Ethics Commission Staff

Robert D. Harris, Executive Director (present in the conference room)  
Kee M. Campbell, Enforcement Director (via video conference)  
Bonita Y.M. Chang, Compliance Director (via video conference)  
Nancy C. Neuffer, Staff Attorney (via video conference)  
Jennifer M. Yamanuha, Staff Attorney (via video conference)  
Jodi L. K. Yi, Staff Attorney (via video conference)  
Patrick W.C. Lui, Computer Specialist (via video conference)  
Jared Elster, Investigator (via video conference)  
Barbara A. Gash, Investigatory Analyst (via video conference)

Myles A. Yamamoto, Administrative Assistant (present in the conference room)

Members of the Public

Chad Blair

Gary Cordery

“People”

**CALL TO ORDER (0:05)**

Vice Chair Tobias called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Present at the meeting were Vice Chair Tobias, Commissioner Hong, Commissioner Thielen, Commissioner Becker, and Commission staff. All participating Commissioners and staff confirmed that no one was in the room with them at their respective remote locations. Chair Fong was excused.

**Agenda Item No. I: Consideration and Approval of the Minutes of the February 19, 2025 Meeting (2:28)**

Commissioner Hong moved to approve the minutes from the February 19, 2025, meeting, which Commissioner Thielen seconded. The motion passed with Commissioners Tobias, Hong, Thielen, and Becker voting in favor, while Chair Fong was excused.

**Agenda Item No. II: Directors' Report (3:03)**

Compliance Director Bonita Chang reported that both DAGS and B&F are reporting completion percentages of 95%. The aggregate training completion percentage is now over 90%. Staff will continue to collaborate with agency human resource contacts for employee training requirements. The priority this year, however, will be on training curriculum materials and content. She also reported that staff is working with the Office of the Governor to establish a training session for new board and commission members.

Director Chang noted that Lobbying Organization reports for January–February 2025 are due on March 31, and that staff expects an increase in contacts to the office due to the filing deadline. In addition, financial disclosure filing season is underway and staff has requested annual updates from various agencies.

Enforcement Director Kee Campbell reported that 20 new matters were opened for the month and 26 closed. He reported that staff is working on additional enhancements for

reporting enforcement data and that the new information should be ready by the April Meeting.

On behalf of the Aloha Freedom Coalition, public member Gary Cordery asked about the complaints he submitted about the Elections Commission and Office of Elections. He noted that staff had already responded by stating the subject matter of the complaints is not under the Commission's purview, but that he wanted staff to look into them nonetheless. He further said that he requested that the commission undertake a review per Haw. Rev. Stat. § 84-31 into his concerns. He further asked that the Commission provide a written formal statement regarding his complaint.

Executive Director Robert Harris replied that the investigations of complaints are confidential by statute. Director Harris explained other procedural options under the Ethics Code and offered to provide instructions to Mr. Cordery following the meeting.

Mr. Cordery asked Director Harris to clarify his role with the Commission and what the Commission's position is related to his concerns.

Director Harris explained that he is the Commission's Executive Director and General Counsel. He further explained that he reports to the Commission and the Commission Chair. He noted that the Commission does not represent any other agency. Under the statute, ethics investigations are kept confidential to ensure due process and the integrity of the investigation. As such, the Commission is precluded from discussing such matters in a public meeting, except as part of a contested case hearing.

Director Harris also explained that the Commission only has jurisdiction over Ch. 84. He described scenarios involving conflicts of interest, abuse of a state position, and failure to file financial disclosure requirements as examples of typical complaints. Director Harris further explained that concerns regarding an agency not performing its tasks or acting incompetently are typically matters for the courts and not necessarily under the Commission's purview.

Mr. Cordery asked who had jurisdiction over his complaints, if the Commission did not have jurisdiction over this matter. He argued that the matter should be under the Commission's jurisdiction.

Vice Chair Tobias reiterated that the Commission may not have statutory jurisdiction over this matter and advised Mr. Cordery to follow the procedural options that Director Harris will provide to him.

**Agenda Item No. III: Discussion of Media Reports Concerning Ethics or the Ethics Commission Since the Last Meeting (23:04)**

Executive Director Robert Harris reported on the following media reports concerning ethics:

- A Star-Advertiser report about the good government bills still pending before the legislature.
- A Hawaii News Now report about the withdrawal of the nomination of a member of the Water Resource Commission. The report noted ethics issues related to the nominee.
- A Civil Beat article regarding the upcoming Commission Vacancy.
- A Civil Beat article contrasting the styles of the Elections and Ethics Commissions.
- A Civil Beat article about good government bills.

**Agenda Item No. IV: 2025 Proposed Ethics Commission Logo Update and Brand Guidelines (24:23)**

Executive Director Harris reported that the staff has undertaken redesigning the Commission's logo and branding as part of enhanced outreach efforts. He noted that a volunteer consultant was engaged to assist with the process. A draft of the new logo design and guidelines was circulated. He also said that the Hawaiian name for the Commission can be found on the website.

**Agenda Item No. V: 2025 Legislative Matters (25:58)**

Executive Director Harris reported that the governor has signed the Commission's budget. He also reported that the Commission's bills are alive and moving in the Legislature. Lastly, Director Harris noted that a proposal to extend nepotism restrictions to the legislature is also still alive and pending before the House.

**Agenda Item No. VI: Akana v. Hawai'i State Ethics Commission and Daniel Gluck, Civil No. 18-1-1019-06 (JHA); Akana v. Hawai'i State Ethics Commission, Civil No. 19-1-0379-03 (JHA); State of Hawai'i, Ethics Commission v. Rowena Akana, Civil No. 20-1-0453 (BIA) (26:56)**

Executive Director Robert Harris reported that there are no updates.

**Agenda Item No. VII: Adjournment of Sunshine Law Meeting (27:42)**

Commissioner Thielen requested that staff look into the issues raised by Mr. Cordery.

Vice Chair Tobias agreed.

Executive Director Robert Harris explained procedural options available to Mr. Cordery. He also recommended re-circulating the Commissioner's Manual at the next meeting and will provide a briefing and discussion about the roles and purview of the Commission.

Commissioner Hong agreed with the suggested course of action.

At approximately 9:32 a.m., Commissioner Hong moved to adjourn the meeting, and Commissioner Thielen seconded the motion. The motion passed, with Commissioners Tobias, Hong, Thielen, and Becker voting in favor. Chair Fong was excused.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:34 a.m.

Minutes approved on May 21, 2025.